

The University of St. Petersburg

The hopes and enthusiasms of the new era were most powerfully felt in the capital, where student messianism could feed on being in the place where decisions were actually being taken, in a cosmopolitan city where students could on occasion fraternize with this or that “reformer” in the houses of a numerous and progressive *obshchestvo*. The career of the “student movement” in St. Petersburg was more dramatic and in the end more explosive than in other university cities; in that sense it was not typical. But there is much to be gained by observing the dynamics of a general process where the outlines were clearest and most extreme.

Stirrings were apparent as early as the winter of 1856–57. Lev Modzalevsky, a prominent figure in the early *skhodki* and subsequently a well-known and respected liberal educator, had this to say about the university, which he entered from a St. Petersburg gymnasium in 1856:

At the beginning of Alexander’s reign all of Russian society (*obshchestvo*) experienced decided difficulties in the abrupt transition from the rule of Nicholas to the abundant new life, rich in the most iridescent hopes. The wall between Russia and Western Europe suddenly fell; the dead formalism collapsed, together with many of its constraints; everyone caught a whiff of greater freedom of thought and word. Together with the government, *obshchestvo* itself dashed toward the reform which had to precede the verification of new principles and the repudiation of the old delusions and defects. Our

university, which had only 350 enrolled students, soon took on up to 1,000 new members of every estate, calling and age—and life became more noisy, precisely *more noisy*, since peace and quiet are necessary for study. The most merciless rejection, necessary for the renewal of the old life, penetrated the university from *obshchestvo* and found there the most fertile kind of soil. We—youth—boldly and triumphantly denied previous principles of morality and citizenship, although new ones had not yet been found. And in fact no one was in a hurry to find them and all energies were expended on rejection. If in fact new principles were taken on, then they still had to be verified,—and then we sought their realization in life, sparing nothing that they might triumph. . . . Employing the freedom which had been granted to us, to which we were as yet not accustomed, we soon stopped attending the lectures of strict and boring professors, who gave us their knowledge in some kind of dead form, and came into the lecture hall only to hear those who tried to apply their knowledge to the solution of essential questions, to the destruction of the old evil, and to the disclosure before us of new, fresh ideals, on the most rapid realization of which depended, it appeared, the entire happiness of our governmental, social, family and individual lives.¹

Writing many years later, Modzalevsky laid heavy stress on the idealism of his contemporaries, their strong sense of mission, and their developing sense of a corporate identity. He rather dryly noted another characteristic of the movement, which other observers have noticed in other student activists: ". . . we gradually got out of the habit of all quiet, hard work which was not flashy, which did not bear fruit quickly."²

Prince G. A. Shcherbatov, the curator of the educational district, was unusually sympathetic to moderate student "activism"; he introduced the *skhodka* to the St. Petersburg student body himself. He hoped to make use of these periodic gatherings to guide and control the rapidly expanding student body. As long as the *skhodki* were regarded as a species of school assembly, there was no very obvious student enthusiasm for them. But soon *skhodki* were being convened by students involved in various projects, without the explicit urging—or even consent—of the curator, and interest in them picked up.

By the end of the year, a new student solidarity could be observed in the widespread concern for the lot of poorer stu-

dents. A journal entitled *Miscellany* (*Sbornik*) was established to publish student literary and scholarly works, the proceeds to go into a fund for their needy compatriots; a series of public lectures by prominent professors was arranged to the same end. The liberal and meritocratic atmosphere from which the *Miscellany* emerged can be gauged from a speech that Modzalevsky, one of its moving spirits, gave to a *skhodka* of students from the faculty of Oriental languages on October 20, 1857.

Culture [Modzalevsky told his audience] does not belong to one class. In our century—the century of the destruction of monopoly and all exclusive rights—still less must it have an exclusive character. To the man of science there are no estates, no titles, no uniforms and thank God we already have a sphere where the external affiliations of a person do not swallow up the person himself. . . . It seems to us, that is to say, that the university is a sphere in which there must be only seekers after knowledge, not *petite bourgeoisie*, not merchants, not officials, not officers, not Russian aristocrats.³

At first the authorities took a benevolent and even an active interest in these proceedings. Government facilities were made available for the printing of the *Miscellany*, and the Empress donated three hundred rubles. But this rather tame experiment in student journalism soon fell victim to changing times. The students who came to the university in 1857, and especially those who arrived in 1858, were perceptibly more radical and political than their predecessors; the bland, “scholarly” fare provided by the *Miscellany* did not appeal to them, and the journal died a lingering death. But it served as a rallying point for student corporatism and solidarity at the time. And even in the spring of 1857, the *skhodki* that were called to deal with the *Miscellany*’s business were harbingers of the more political and obstreperous future, as A. M. Skabichevsky, one of the participants, recalled:

Although the *skhodki* were convened to read articles for the miscellanies and decide whether they were suitable for publication, I somehow do not remember a single such reading; I remember endless conversations, youthful dreams and quarrels, I remember readings of

new issues of Herzen's *Bell*, this or that suppressed poem or article, circulated, at the time, abundantly in handwritten copies. For instance, it was at one of these *skhodki* that I first became acquainted with Nekrasov's poem, "Belinskii." Our classmate, Vsevolod Krestovskii, in turn, read his ultra-radical poems.⁴

L. F. Panteleev was an activist among the students who arrived in the fall of 1858, and he confirmed that his contemporaries were rather more interested in social and political matters than their predecessors had been. Doubtless exaggerating the watershed nature of 1858, Panteleev divided the older students into two categories: those who drank, horsed around, and behaved more or less consciously like German *Burschen*; and those who worked hard but narrowly and unimaginatively at their defined course of study, without "social interests" or the passion for periodical reading that was to be so typical of their engagé successors. Among the first students whom Panteleev met upon his arrival at the university was the son of a peasant woman, like himself from Vologda. He had come in first on the entrance examinations, but to Panteleev's astonishment he was not at all interested in the emancipation of the peasants and did not read either Nekrasov or Turgenev.⁵

A more enduring example of student solidarity and concern for their colleagues in need was the *kassa*, or mutual aid fund. An offshoot of the *Miscellany*, the *kassa* came into existence formally in December 1857. Funds were solicited from the more well-to-do and were also brought in by theatrical performances, lectures, concerts, and the like. After a discreet investigation of the circumstances of the recipient, the students would either grant him the money outright or give him a loan. Formal criteria for defining eligibility were never agreed upon, and a means test seemed "degrading." Between December 31, 1857, and June 1, 1859, the *kassa* raised and distributed nine thousand rubles; in the same period the government dispensed only seven thousand rubles in aid.⁶

Student assertiveness was more evident in 1857-58. Long hair and particularly mustaches were in evidence for the first time,

and some students simply defied the authorities, who demanded that they shave them off. Students also defied the ban on smoking within the university; after a certain amount of fuss they were given a smoking room. "All these things were trifles," Skabichevsky recalled, "but they somehow raised our spirits and inspired us. The university became especially attractive. You would walk around within its walls and feel, with every step, as if your heart were beating more and more strongly within your breast. You were expecting something new, special, bravura. Everyone felt an irresistible longing to show his worth in some desperately courageous, heroic action."⁷

Excitement mounted steadily throughout the year, as it did in the other Russian universities as well. For weeks at a time there was some kind of *skhodka* nearly every day. Petitions to the authorities became more and more frequent; they seemed to be circulating almost constantly. Many related to clashes with the police, frequently stemming from student noise and disorder in St. Petersburg. Although they were not as yet political, the students responded as a body: they fought back physically, they petitioned the university and the city authorities—and they rightly believed that they had public opinion on their side. The arrogant city police were not popular with any group in St. Petersburg.

Rumors began to circulate—that a revolution was coming, that the capital was going to be moved to Kiev, that Grand Duke Konstantin, the Emperor's liberal brother, was already writing a constitution, that there would be orthographic reform! The very uncertainty of the authorities spurred the students on. They *did* achieve redress in several encounters with the police—which simply made ordinary high-handed police behavior seem suddenly more intolerable than it ever had before. When the authorities proved unable to enforce the ban on long hair and in effect connived at this small breach of regulations, the entire structure of rules that they embodied and represented lost some of its legitimacy. There were sharp encounters between faculty members and students, although nothing really serious yet. Interest in self-government grew

rapidly; a number of *skhodki* were given over to a project for turning the university into a republic, run by elected legislative and judicial bodies.

It was also just about this time that the students first began to be aware of real divisions in their own ranks—between those who, in one way or another, clung to the old way of doing things, and those who embodied the new. On the side of the old were the mock-German students, the generally indifferent, and those who studied narrowly and compulsively with their careers in mind. The students of the new era grouped themselves, in 1858, in a rough fashion around two handwritten journals: the relatively moderate *Herald of Free Opinion* and the more radical *Little Bell*. The differences between the two groups seem to have had more to do with style than substance. Both were sharply critical of the students, faculty, and administration; neither made direct reference to national politics, but both gave clear evidence of a generally disrespectful attitude toward authority. A copy of the *Herald* eventually found its way to Emperor Alexander, via the Third Section, and he was quite upset. Prince Shcherbatov summoned the editor and contributors to his office and praised the journal profusely, but went on to say that he thought it might be better if he were accepted as a kind of adviser and collaborator who would be able to advise the students in cases where they might be misinterpreted by the nervous authorities beyond the university walls. So impressive was his gentleness and sympathy that the students did not feel it possible to oppose him directly; but the addition of this august representative of the administration to the editorial board robbed the *Herald* of much of its charm, and it did not long survive.⁸

The students at St. Petersburg—and elsewhere—became more and more possessed by missionary zeal. They wanted to proselytize beyond the walls of the university, to begin their mission of creating a new Russia. This was the great era of the Sunday Schools—voluntary institutions for the instruction of illiterate peasants and urban workers in the rudiments of reading and writing. Most of the instructors in the Sunday Schools seem to

have been students, although there was broad participation by "liberal" *obshchestvo*. Some teachers engaged directly in the propagation of radical ideas, and the Sunday Schools, which had come to number over three hundred, were closed by the police in 1862. But while they lasted (and at one time there were twenty-eight in St. Petersburg) they were an important outlet for "enlightening" impulses.⁹

Many students, in addition, had one or more tutees, generally drawn from the ranks of the well-to-do. For the poorer students, these tutorials were a matter of economic necessity, but some undertook what they considered the education of the country's future elite for missionary, rather than financial, reasons. And in 1859, many members of *obshchestvo* were quite willing to have their children educated by radical (or cryptoradical) students; moreover, they often sat in on the tutorials themselves. As Skabichevsky, a former tutor, remembered the experience:

It was quite natural that with the increasing excitement of society's mood the very air, it seemed, was alive with the thirst for progress and enlightenment. A couple of students had only to appear in some rural neighborhood, and even if they did not want to busy themselves with the education of young ladies, proposing instead to tramp through the woods and shoot partridges, the young ladies of the neighborhood would themselves draw them into the enterprise, bombarding them with a mass of questions, demanding explanations, importuning them with violent quarrels, asking for serious books, etc.

Such phrases as "ridding oneself of vulgar, obsolete prejudices," "putting off from oneself the old man," "awakening to a new life" became highly fashionable. The novels of the time could not begin in any other way than with the sudden appearance of "him," who struck "her" with the breadth of his knowledge and erudition, the depth of his ideas and the dizzying novelty of his daring views.

Mummy and daddy were still not frightened then by the appearance of the "new man" at their estate. The springtime of Russia's renewal was still radiant with the most iridescent colors. Mummies and daddies themselves had nothing against playing liberal and seating the young apostle of progress in a prominent place at their table, together with the tutor, who, in his turn, tried to strut his own stuff in front of the student and show that he was not old hat. In all of this there was something genuinely naive and touchingly bucolic.¹⁰

He goes on to observe, however, that the “enlighteners” were not yet the embittered enemies of the existing order that many of them became after the struggles and political polarization of the years 1861–63. By the mid-1860s, “mummy and daddy” had a quite different attitude toward the apostles of progress.

It is no accident that in his little drama of education in the provinces Skabichevsky made the tutees women. For the late 1850s in Russia saw the real beginnings of what was to be called the “woman question”: the lengthy debate over the role of women and their place in Russian society.¹¹ Radicals of Herzen’s generation had been interested in Saint-Simonian ideas on the subject, and the novels of George Sand had enjoyed a distinct vogue, but the question of the emancipation of women became an important social issue only in the new era. The most influential early posing of the question from a pro-feminist point of view was an article by the prominent doctor and educator Nikolai Pirogov, entitled “Questions of Life.” Pirogov had been largely responsible for the organization and utilization of female nurses at the front during the Crimean War, and in the postwar period he went on to devote considerable effort to bringing the question of women’s education before the public.

Small wonder that the mood of the new era touched women as well as men. For until the late 1850s the role of women was conceived entirely in domestic terms and there was no higher education for them at all. Nadezhda Destunis, one of the first women publicists, related her arguments about women’s education directly to the atmosphere of the post-Crimean period: “Can it be [she wrote in a letter to the Slavophile periodical, *Russian Colloquy*] that in our time when everywhere, in all of Russian society, there is so much activity, so much seething, so much striving forward—can it be that the Russian woman alone remains a passive, non-participating spectator to all this activity? Cannot some role for her in this common endeavor be found?”¹²

In the late 1850s—and with increasing fervor and better organization in the 1860s—Russian women did begin to redefine their social role, but the struggle was long and difficult. The first periodical devoted to at least a semiserious discussion of women’s

problems, *Daybreak*, was founded in 1859.¹³ Admission to higher education was an obvious place to begin, and soon Russian women began to appear in the lecture halls of the University of St. Petersburg, although they were "free auditors" rather than regular students. Panteleev recalled his first encounter with a woman in the university:

It was the fall semester of 1860 and we second-year law students were sitting in Lecture Hall IX and waiting for Professor Kavelin. The hall, as always during his lectures, was packed: Konstantin Dmitrievich was then at the zenith of his popularity. Kavelin came in on time, but to our absolute astonishment, right behind him appeared the figure of the rector, P. A. Pletnëv, with a young and pretty woman on his arm. Pëtr Aleksandrovich courteously seated the young woman in an arm chair, sat down himself, and Kavelin, as if nothing were out of the ordinary, read his lecture. I do not think, however, that on this occasion we all listened to the lecture with our customary attention. The same thing happened at the following lecture; then Kavelin himself escorted the young lady several times and then she began to appear alone in the lecture hall, carrying a notebook to write down the lecture and seating herself, in expectation of the professor, in one of the regular chairs. The young lady was of a quite markedly Italian type, of no great height, always wearing a black wool dress of a simple sort; her hair was cut rather short and gathered in a net.* She was Natal'ia Ieronimovna Korsini, daughter of a rather well known St. Petersburg architect. . . . Her mother, no longer alive at that time, had taken some part in literature in the 'forties and at the beginning of the 'fifties and was an acquaintance of Pletnëv.¹⁴

Korsini soon began to attend other classes, and her example was followed by other women, until, by the end of the second semester, women in university lectures were a generally accepted phenomenon, no longer worthy of note, as other issues dominated the attention of the community. It is worth pointing out, however, that the University of St. Petersburg was altogether more enlightened on this subject than the University of Moscow. There, the University Council voted against the admission of women as auditors, with only two professors recorded as favoring

*The simple black wool dress and the short hair would seem to indicate that Korsini considered herself a radical, although the fact that she was escorted by Pletnëv probably meant that she was a rather respectable one.

their entrance. In the furor of the early 1860s, the admission of women to the university came to be regarded as genuinely "radical," and in 1863 all women were forbidden to attend. Not until the 1870s were women able to achieve their own courses at the university level, and for a good deal longer their status was highly uncertain.

Throughout the academic years 1858–59 and 1859–60, the temper of the students grew steadily more self-confident, independent, and boisterous. The university was becoming unrecognizable to the students of a mere half-dozen years before. Part of the change was due to the increasing number of outsiders who swarmed to the lectures and simply hung around. The women auditors were the most spectacular addition, but people from all walks of Russian life—officers, government employees, professional people, priests—were simply "there" and contributed, directly and indirectly, to the chaotic vitality of the scene.

In the course of my five-year stint at the university [Skabichevsky recalled], it went through such a radical change as to be unrecognizable. Instead of the old dead silence of empty corridors through which small groups of frightened and well turned out students shyly moved only in the interval between lectures, now, from dawn until dark, the university was as noisy as a beehive; you had to fight your way through its corridors and lecture halls.¹⁵

The university was more and more fashionable and at the center of things, and this fact augmented the students' sense of their own importance. The explosions that rocked the universities in 1861–62 cannot be understood without taking into account the uneven momentum that had been building for the previous several years.

Khodki became, more and more, a regular and accepted part of one's daily life. They accustomed the students who gravitated toward them to argument and debate, to noise and unruliness, to deciding issues, in some sense, on their merits and in the open. They affected the *consciousness* of the students in a fashion most hostile to the essentially passive ideal of student behavior that the authorities had unreservedly held until recently and upon which

they would soon fall back. A steady stream of incidents, some involving the authorities, others having to do with disputes among the students, increased the numbers and disorder at the meetings.

Another extremely important aspect of the *skhodki* was that the students came to use them as quasi-legal instruments—to police their own organizations and to render judgment on those accused of violating the trust of the student body or misusing its funds. A kind of demystification of the students' attitude toward law seems to have occurred. Their hostility toward decisions rendered from on high, toward the arbitrary, toward mere order-keeping—as well as toward obvious injustice—was greater and nearer the surface.

The student community's evolution toward a more open and, in a sense, Western system of legal regulation culminated in what the American historian Thomas Hegarty calls "the first public jury trial in all Russia,"¹⁶ which took place on March 5 and 6, 1860. The defendant was Nikolai Butchik, treasurer of the student *kassa* at St. Petersburg, who was accused and convicted of having embezzled student funds. He was sentenced to pay a fine equivalent to the sum he had taken and to be expelled from the university. Professor V. D. Spasovich, a political moderate, favorite of the students, and specialist in criminal law, served as chief justice. There were prosecuting and defense attorneys, and the verdict was rendered by a five-man jury and immediately announced to all the students at a *skhodka*. The curator gave his permission for the trial, and Spasovich helped the students with the procedures. The university authorities seem to have had little idea how "radicalizing" such an experience was likely to be for Russian students.

It is therefore scarcely surprising that the line demarcating university issues from national issues became somewhat attenuated and student interest in the larger issues of national politics increased. At the same time, radical attitudes on those issues became more common among the students—in a sense, more normal. Thus the more timid and conformist among the students could express such attitudes with less fear of censure;

indeed, in certain circles, radicalism was fashionable and even de rigueur, always an auspicious development for the growth of a student "movement."

One convenient gathering place for the radical and activist minority was the student library, which had been established on a subscription basis by two students in 1858. After passing through a series of managerial crises, it was operating, by mid-1859, "under rules drawn up by the student body at large" and was responsible to periodic *skhodki*. "The room occupied by the library," as Hegarty notes, "grew into more than a place for locating necessary reading materials. Students turned it into a club, where particularly in the evenings they came not so much to read and study as to talk over important issues affecting both the university and the nation. Librarian Iakovlev took pains to provide copies of Herzen's *Bell* for the students; discussions often centered on the issues which it had raised."¹⁷

The fall of 1860 was rather quiet—in part, apparently, because of a certain disenchantment with the chaotic regime of *skhodki*, in part because many of the activist students were occupied with teaching in the newly opened Sunday Schools. But this was merely a lull before the storm, and a series of episodes in the second semester restored the momentum that had been building in the previous year.

In February, the university administration excluded a speech by Professor N. I. Kostomarov from the program of a university celebration because they believed the subject of the Emancipation was likely to be broached. A spontaneous demonstration broke out at the close of the ceremony, forcing the rector to flee, although he later was compelled to return to the rostrum, where, shaking with terror, he promised the students that Kostomarov would give his speech that evening in the great hall of the university.¹⁸ Kostomarov did, and was carried in triumph from the hall on the shoulders of the students.

Far more serious was the sequence of events that followed the death of Taras Shevchenko, the great Ukrainian nationalist poet, on February 26; the funerals of oppositional figures were ideal occasions for the expression of antigovernment sentiment. Shev-

chenko's, on February 28, turned into a massive, if orderly, political demonstration—of a rather vague and unfocused kind. It also provided the occasion for a *rapprochement* between the leaders of the Russian student corporation and some of the most active Polish students, who had hitherto tended to stand aside from the activities of their Russian colleagues. A few days later, the funeral of an in no way noteworthy Polish student who had died of natural causes became at the last minute a requiem for five Polish students who had been shot several days earlier by Russian troops in Warsaw. Russian and Polish students attended in large numbers, and they were joined by a number of Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish faculty members and by a crowd of sympathizers from St. Petersburg society. Toward the end of the service, the Poles broke into a "patriotic anthem," which could not be drowned out by the organist. All present, Hegarty reports, "were deeply moved."¹⁹ When it was rumored that only the Poles were to be held responsible for the demonstration, three hundred Russian students signed a statement that they, too, had taken part in the requiem. Although the curator came to the brink of resigning, he did not, and no students were punished. Relations between the Russians and Poles further improved, and the student body reckoned that they had won yet another victory. Each of their triumphs generated further momentum and a willingness to seek out and tackle the next issue.

While all of these changes were taking place within the university walls, the attitude of the government, and particularly of Alexander II, was undergoing a very different kind of evolution: from enthusiasm to anxiety to positive hostility. Alexander had made the key decisions that were so important in initiating the ferment in the universities and in *obshchestvo* at large. On the one hand, no one can doubt the genuineness, however limited, of the Emperor's reforming impulse. But Alexander was neither strong nor decisive; even with respect to the Emancipation—in all its ambiguity his major achievement—he often prevailed through a kind of muddled stubbornness rather than through foresight or firmness. Furthermore, his "liberalization"—nowhere more than in the universities—represented a leap into the

unknown. Not only did he have no real idea of what his measures would lead to, he had only the vaguest idea of what he wanted. So it is not surprising that his initial optimism and “belief in the students” did not prove durable; and once it was shaken, he tended to take refuge in the belief that a group of ill-intentioned persons had formed a subversive conspiracy against him. His father’s propensity to believe in conspiracies had already become legendary, and the tendency was strong in a good many high government officials.*

At first, Alexander was skeptical. During the academic year 1857–58, the governor-general of Moscow sent him a telegram, concerning a rather minor incident, saying that in effect a “revolt” had occurred among the Moscow students. Alexander replied coldly that he did not believe this to be true and referred instead to the “crude actions” of the police;²⁰ his phrase was the contemporary equivalent of “police brutality.” But Alexander’s confidence in the students was already being eroded. In September we find him making anxious inquiries, via the head of the political police, as to whether the students of the University of St. Petersburg were behaving themselves and whether things were “in order.” He received a soothing reply from the minister of education: the students were showing proper respect for authority and not gathering in unruly groups for discussion. But the Emperor was (quite properly) not entirely convinced by his minister’s words, noting in the margin: “I wish that it were so.”²¹ A few weeks later, after a petty disorder at Kazan’, Alexander issued an imperial decree forbidding the students to show pleasure or displeasure at lectures. The employment of an imperial decree to regulate cheering and booing during university lectures indicates how serious a view of the situation Alexander took.²²

Throughout 1859 and 1860, Alexander continued to feel—and behave—ambivalently toward the universities. He took steps to

*In 1862, the Russian government closed the Sunday Schools; Alexander had been prevailed upon to believe that they harbored a full-blown radical conspiracy. Soviet historians tend to accept that conclusion; for quite different reasons they, too, are desirous of discovering conspiracies, which they adduce in support of the revolutionary militancy of various areas of Russian society in the 1860s. So the picture that emerges from the work of many Soviet historians, citing tsarist governmental sources, is of a much more “revolutionary” situation than in fact existed.

clarify the fact that when outside the university walls students were in fact subject to police regulations, just as were all other citizens. Admissions were stiffened, apparently with a view to admitting a more "studious" and orderly element, and on several occasions Alexander expressed concern about order within the walls and about the infusion of the lower classes into higher education. At the same time, the process of liberalizing and enriching the curriculum, which had been going on since the beginning of his reign, continued. Philosophy was restored as a field, new chairs were awarded in both Moscow and St. Petersburg, and—most striking of all—in May 1860, all universities were granted the right to receive scholarly books and journals from abroad without having to submit them to the censorship.²³

By the spring of 1860, Alexander had become extremely concerned about the state of the universities, and his anxiety deepened steadily over the course of the next twelve months. In the summer of 1860, he established a commission to look into the question in detail and to ascertain whether E. P. Kovalevsky, the moderate and rather sensible minister of education, had not been too permissive and rather derelict in fulfilling his supervisory responsibilities. The commission presented its report the following April. Not only was it deeply critical of Kovalevsky, it suggested vaguely that the student disturbances were interconnected—a notion that ministered to Alexander's deep fears of conspiracy.

Kovalevsky counterattacked vigorously and managed, for the time being, to save his job. But Alexander remained convinced that the situation in the universities was fraught with subversive and disorderly potential; the Emancipation of the serfs had finally been proclaimed, and the government was highly uncertain about the economic and political future of the country. The upshot was that yet another commission was appointed, this one including Kovalevsky and presided over by Count S. G. Stroganov, an intelligent moderate conservative who enjoyed excellent personal relations both with the imperial family and with numerous Russian intellectuals. Stroganov had been curator of the Moscow Educational District during the 1840s and was given much

of the credit for the modest intellectual renaissance it had enjoyed at that time. The recommendations of the Stroganov Commission, incorporating further criticisms by Kovalevsky and reworked in part by the Council of Ministers, became the famous "May Rules" of 1861, which finally brought the disturbances at the University of St. Petersburg (and elsewhere) to a head and concluded the first phase of the student movement's involvement in Russian social and political life.

Most of the propositions set forth in the May Rules were complex and specific. Two factors were of the utmost importance to the students and were primarily responsible for touching off—not causing—the disorders that ensued. In the first place, it was clear that the authorities, from Alexander down, intended to end the corporate institutions that had sprung up in the universities over the preceding five years and the unruly and insubordinate spirit that had accompanied them. Surveillance of the student body was reemphasized, and those who did not adhere to the rules were to be dismissed. All *skhodki* not specifically authorized by the authorities were forbidden, as was all bargaining with "mobs." At the same time, Admiral E. V. Putiatin, a brusque and rigid disciplinarian, replaced Kovalevsky as minister of education and a decision was taken to introduce the new regulations not gradually, but "at once."

There is no question that the decision to eliminate student corporate institutions would have been extremely difficult to implement without serious disorder, even had the executors of the new policy been endowed with an unprecedented combination of tact, sensitivity, and forcefulness. But the implementation of the May Rules deserves to stand as a monument of how not to introduce a policy that is sure to be deeply unpopular with an excited student body. The students left for their summer vacation in early June knowing nothing about the content of the new rules but with rumors of the most diverse kind in the air. Soon after they left, Putiatin decided to introduce the new rules all at once. He then ordered that the *kassa* and the library were to be taken over by the university authorities. On July 20, Alexander decreed that the student uniform was to be abolished, with the

decisions made, and then, he set off for a lengthy and well-earned rest in the Crimea.

The result of all this activity was that when the students reconvened in the fall, they did so in a mood of pessimism and bitterness, but without having any precise idea of what was going to happen.²⁴ Nor did it occur to Putiatin that it might be useful to enlist faculty support, least of all from contemptible liberals like Kavelin and Spasovich, whom he considered nearly as unreliable as the students. During the previous spring, Curator Ivan Delianov had turned to Kavelin and three other professors and asked them to draw up a code that would effectively regulate student behavior. The professors were pleased to be asked and responded quickly. They made use of elected student deputies in an attempt to ensure that their results would be acceptable to the student body as a whole, and ended several months' labor with a proposal that confirmed the student institutions but regulated them rather strictly: the *skhodka* was to meet under the chairmanship of a professor and elect officers who would be in charge of the *kassa*, the library, the *Miscellany* (should it survive), and other student organizations. Only a committee, made up of the elected student officers, should be able to convene the *skhodka* and bring business before it. A special court would be set up to judge student offenders, and further proposals provided for strict rules against disruption by students within the university.²⁵

The May Rules meant that the proposal of the Kavelin Commission was doomed. The professors, however, still thought they might cushion the shock of the new regulations and help the students through the transition period as they were introduced. Then it became clear that there would be no transition period, and although the University Council elected a group of professors to help implement the rules, most of their suggestions were ignored. Of the few that *were* adopted, one turned out to be a fatal mistake. The idea was that the new regulations should be included in a booklet that would also contain the student's residency permit, grades, and library card—something along the lines of the German university *Studiumbuch*, known at the University of Dorpat as a *Matrikel* and in Russian as a *matrikul*. Thus

a convenient symbol of the oppressive new order was dreamed up by the liberal opposition and issued by the reactionary authorities. And the administrative situation could not have been worse in the fall of 1861: Delianov had been replaced as curator by General G. I. Filipson, an inexperienced tool of Putiatin; Pletnëv, the rector, was in Western Europe, and his replacement, I. I. Sreznevsky, did not have the old man's moral authority.²⁶

Thus, when the university formally convened on September 17, the students still did not know the content of the May Rules, and the faculty, which did know them, had become thoroughly alienated from the Ministry of Education and the acting curator. From the moment that the convocation prayer was over, large crowds of students met in daily *skhodki* to decide what to do. A number of the more activist and radical students—among them N. V. Shelgunov, E. P. Mikhaelis, and M. P. Pokrovsky—founded a “secret committee” to ensure that the growing student protests would be properly channeled and directed. Several of these leaders were close to Chernyshevsky.

The administration, after trying to ignore the *skhodki* for several days, ordered a partial lockout in an attempt to deny the students a place to meet. The virtually inevitable result was that the students broke into the main auditorium, had their *skhodka*, and decided that they would not accept the *matrikuly*, which were supposed to be distributed in the near future, as a symbol of their rejection of the new rules—whose content they still did not officially know. Putiatin reacted by closing the university—without, of course, consulting the faculty—and as a result there occurred the first mass action by the student body. By midmorning on September 25, a crowd of about a thousand students had assembled in the courtyard of the university. It was rumored, and widely believed, that some student deputies had been arrested. Violent and inflammatory speeches were made, and the crowd suddenly decided to confront Curator Filipson at his apartment, where the students (wrongly) believed him to be.

It was a beautiful September day. The sun shone brilliantly on the long lines of the student procession, the head of which was already

approaching Palace Bridge while the tail had just emerged from the gates of the university. Along our route there were crowds of girls, auditors of university lectures and a great many young people having some connection or other with the students or simply sympathizing with us. We arrived at Nevsky Prospekt without noticing anything particular around us. Upon our appearance at about Morskaya Street and further along Nevsky, the French hairdressers ran out of their shops and with animated faces and sparkling eyes, rubbing their hands together delightedly, they cried: "Révolution! Révolution! V'la ça commune! ça y est! Voyons! Voyons!" etc.²⁷

By the time the students arrived at Filipson's apartment, they had been joined by a substantial contingent of mounted police and troops. When Filipson heard what had happened, he returned to his apartment and negotiations began. Eventually he was accompanied by the students back to the university. The atmosphere was very tense, but nobody did anything violent. While the students remained in the courtyard, a deputation waited on Filipson. The students put forth, essentially, two demands: that they be allowed to use their library while the university was closed; and that the May Rules and the *matrikul'y* be abolished. Filipson rejected both demands, and the students finally dispersed.²⁸

Two other bodies met that evening: the University Council and the so-called Ruling Council, which Alexander II had constituted to make decisions on his behalf while he was away from St. Petersburg. The members of the University Council refused to take responsibility for formally introducing the May Rules, to which most of them were opposed. The meeting was angry, and Filipson withdrew to consult the ministry. The Ruling Council informed the students that if they engaged in further disorderly behavior, troops would be used against them, and ordered that the "most guilty" students be arrested. By the morning of September 26, thirty-two students were in custody.²⁹

But the arrests did not have the desired effect. Not only did they not bring home to the students the reality of their powerlessness, they induced demonstrations of sympathy from Petersburg *obshchestvo*: professors, young officers, medical students,

and other sympathizers flocked to what was becoming a virtually continuous *skhodka* in the university courtyard. On September 27, the courtyard was surrounded by troops, and the governor-general of St. Petersburg informed the students that if they did not disperse immediately, he would order the soldiers to open fire. Absolute pandemonium ensued, but the students remained, screaming that they would die for their rights and for their arrested comrades if need be. Then, reported an eyewitness,

on a pile of lumber appeared the tall, dark figure of one of the women auditors who was most respected by us and most devoted to intellectual matters, and to the student body, Mar'ia Arsen'evna Bogdanova, who subsequently became a well known educator. Her eyes were full of tears, her face was red and extremely agitated. She began to persuade us that they certainly would not fire on us, since they would not dare, on their own initiative, to cut down two thousand students; the police and cossacks would simply plunge into the crowd, beat us with whips and seize individuals. We were in no position to fight against crude physical force and apart from being beaten up and arrested we would achieve nothing. "For this reason," Bogdanova concluded her speech, "we all, the women here present, beg you, dear comrades, for the sake of our common honor and general welfare, to concede the obvious impossibility of opposition, to disperse immediately, in order to be able to turn to the thinking society of Petersburg for the defense of our just cause." These words had a strongly sobering effect on us and after some brief argument and discussion it was decided to enter into discussion with General Ignat'ev about the conditions for capitulation.³⁰

For the next several weeks the situation remained deadlocked, with Alexander incommunicado in his Crimean resort. Negotiations, punctuated by disorders and further arrests, continued. As the professors refused to distribute the *matrikuly* to the students, an arrangement was concocted by which students could order them through the mail. Some six hundred-odd did so, but when the university was reopened on October 11, class attendance was minuscule. Then students who had not accepted their *matrikuly* were formally notified of their dismissal.

On October 12, the bloody confrontation finally occurred. Several hundred ex-students stormed the main university building;

others were drawn in, and a wild battle with police and soldiers ensued in which many students were badly beaten up and hundreds more were arrested. Between then and December 20, when the Emperor closed the university, it was in a state of semiparalysis, opening briefly and then closing again several times. Despite the fact that the most radical and disruptive students were presumably exiled, consigned to the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul, or simply left the city, *skhodki*, protests, and sporadic violence continued. On December 25, the disastrous reign of Putiatin ended, but not before Kavelin, Spasovich, and several other faculty "liberals" had resigned. A. V. Golovnin, a canny moderate, became minister of education in January 1862. But the university remained closed until August 1863.

While the tide of student militancy was rising, the rebels received powerful if diffuse support, not merely from radicals like Chernyshevsky but from broad strata of Petersburg *obshchestvo*, who helped maintain their élan by treating them as the vanguard in the struggle for a new and more humane order, outside the university as well as within it.

Just where did the support come from? We must depend on the most impressionistic kind of source material—primarily memoirs—to arrive at even the beginnings of an answer. The sympathizers certainly included other, nonuniversity students—studying medicine or preparing for a teaching career. Even some gymnasium pupils became involved. Prestigious political support came from the radical journalists of the *Contemporary* and the *Russian Word* and their more moderate counterparts on *Annals of the Fatherland*, who were less influential and whose support was more sporadic. And there was Herzen, whose influence was at its zenith. Viewing the tumult of the fall of 1861 from London, Herzen announced to his readers that the torch had passed to the students, who, he said, "*alone are pure*. The idea of Russian citizenship has been bred in the universities."³¹ The same veneration can be detected in the words of Elena Andreevna Shtakenshneider, the daughter of a well-known St. Petersburg architect and a keen observer of the intellectual and social scene in the capital. "Events occur ceaselessly, irrepressibly," she wrote

(somewhat incoherently) in her diary on September 28, 1861, "controlled by no one. *Obshchestvo* shies away from them fearfully and only the younger generation looks them right in the eye, like acquaintances, and unafraid, break their young heads to use them as stepping stones to the coming day."³²

The Shtakenshneiders entertained on a lavish scale, and their house was among the most notable gathering places for Petersburg *obshchestvo* sympathetic to the new era. There one might find government officials, army officers, artists, theater people, musicians, and university professors. A similar locus was the house of N. L. Tiblen, a wealthy and progressive editor and sometime artillery officer. Panteleev, who was often at Tiblen's, met Chernyshevsky there, as well as the historian Kostomarov, the chemist N. N. Sokolov, Pëtr Lavrov, who was to become one of Russia's most notable radicals within a few years, and a whole galaxy of Russia's literary and journalistic talent.³³ Yet the minister of the interior, S. S. Lanskoy, was also a friend of Tiblen. Generally speaking, the early 1860s marked the end of such mixed gatherings, which had characterized Russian intellectual life so markedly for the previous half century. Political antagonisms were soon to become too powerful; indeed, it is remarkable that Lanskoy was still able to visit a house where Chernyshevsky was cordially received.

The students, Panteleev informs us, were eagerly sought after by Petersburg society in the fall of 1861, particularly those who had been several months in the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul for their part in the disorders. "The mood of society was extraordinarily elevated," he wrote, describing the last few weeks of 1861:

Wherever you went there was noise, talk, lively disputes, but the main thing was the general expectation that something of enormous significance was going to happen, perhaps even in the very near future. As far as we, the former students, were concerned, we not only had a hearty welcome everywhere, but, it appeared, were much sought after guests. It must be confessed that we accepted all this as a proper tribute for our behavior in the fall of 1861. But since youth always conceives of the future in a somewhat more rapid tempo of

development, we certainly did not consider that our song was sung. We were convinced—and we gave others to understand—that the events of the autumn were only the beginning of that social role to the fulfilment of which “we” were called; and indeed the general chorus echoed our belief that we—namely the “younger generation”—were destined to make the “good word” into living reality.³⁴